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Hawkins, (Sir) Anthony Hope
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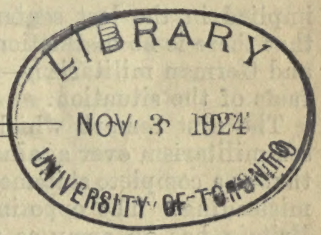
MILITARISM:

GERMAN AND BRITISH.

BY

ANTHONY HOPE.



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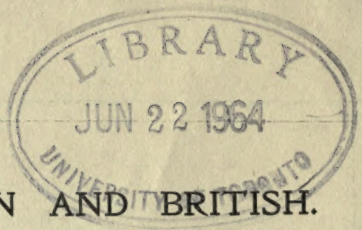

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I came across, the other day, two articles in the American Press —to be precise, in the *Washington Post* of December 19th and 20th last—which seem to me to deserve some examination by both British and American students of the present situation. The writer (for we may, I think, assume a common authorship of the two articles) presents himself as a partisan neither of Germany nor of Great Britain; rather he arraigns both on the same charge and pronounces against both the same condemnation. This he does as an American and in the interests of America: he is entitled, then, to a hearing both from America and from the friends of America; the former must consider her interests, the latter must search their consciences.

He puts his thesis bluntly and without reservations. "There is no distinction to be made between German militarism and British militarism." If "self-interest and self-preservation required the nations to band together against German military aggression, the same compelling motives will cause the nations to line up against Great Britain if she continues her attempt to dominate all nations by securing mastery of the seas" . . . "Germany or Great Britain—it does not matter which. Americans will not wear the yoke of either Power. They will do as the free nations of Europe have done and are now doing; they will fight military domination and destroy it."

With thanks to the writer for the tribute to our present cause implied in the last sentence, let us look at this thesis of his—that there is no distinction to be made between British militarism and German militarism—and see how far it corresponds with the facts of the situation.

The first remark which suggests itself is that to put British sea-militarism over against German land-militarism, and to treat that as a complete statement of the factors of the case, is decidedly misleading. The opposing forces are not fairly or fully stated. Britain has an army as well as a fleet; Germany has a fleet as well as an army. The German army *plus* the German fleet must (for the purposes of a valid argument) be ranged against the British fleet *plus* the British army. And, as I submit, the moment taken for a comparison between these two forces should be the time immediately preceding the present war. Additions to military establishments and forces made since the war began represent not the settled and deliberate policy of statesmen and peoples, but the necessities and apprehensions engendered by the actual struggle. However pacific a man may be, yet when once he is in for a fight he will fight with both hands—and no one will call him more quarrelsome than if he fought with one hand tied behind his back.

Before the war, then, Germany had the most powerful army in the world; she claimed to have it, and it will be generally

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admitted that she was right. I am not denying that, the state of the world being what it was, she had need of a powerful army; nor will I stop to ask what Power was most responsible for the state of the world being what it was. In addition to this mighty army, she had the second largest and most powerful fleet in the world; and this fleet she was steadily and resolutely increasing and strengthening with the avowed object of making it so powerful as to be capable, if not of defeating the British fleet, at least of rendering any attack from that fleet an enterprise too hazardous to be faced by Great Britain: in brief, she was seeking, if not to destroy, at least to paralyse the British fleet; and its paralysis would have served her purpose pretty nearly as well as its destruction. If not able actually to conquer Britain herself, she would have been able to rule her out as a factor in European politics, and to render the continued existence of her Empire precarious and, from a military point of view, useless to her.

What were Great Britain's forces at the same moment—just before the war? She had the largest and most powerful fleet in the world. The fact is admitted. Before saying more about it, let us complete the comparison with Germany by looking at the British army. Here I might quote the Germans themselves; I might put the Kaiser and his Generals in the box as witnesses to the innocuousness of the British army. I will employ more moderate language. I will be content to say that of all the Powers which can claim to be called "great," Great Britain had infinitely the smallest army—America alone excepted; and as to America, it is enough for me to say, first, that I presume America knows her own business; secondly, that the Atlantic is a good bit broader than the Channel. That little army of Britain's was a fit little army; it had been reorganised and put into shape; it knew about fighting. But it had not been and was not being materially increased; it made no pretensions of being able to defeat, to paralyse, or even to alarm any army of Continental proportions; it did not aspire to a position like that to which Germany aimed at raising, and claimed that she was raising, her fleet. Set the main arm of Britain against the main arm of Germany, and call them equal. Britain's subsidiary arm was incomparably weaker than the subsidiary arm of Germany. Rightly or wrongly, wisely or unwisely, up to the moment which is material to this argument, the British people had refused to have a great army. They could have had one; they have the men; they have the money. They refused; they said—again, wisely or unwisely—"We don't want a great army; it is not necessary for our security, our interests, or our ambitions." Wisdom be it or folly—at all events this is not militarism! "Germany's Army is not a menace to the United States, because it cannot come to these shores. But Britain's Navy can come, and it can bring an army with it." So says the writer in the *Washington Post*. I doubt if he would get the Germans to agree with him. The British Navy might come, the Germans would say, but they cannot bring a British Army because there is not one to bring—or, at any rate, worth bringing! But

there is a German Army—and why can't the German Navy bring it—if only the British Navy doesn't get in its way? But, though I differ from the writer's reasons, I have no desire to differ from his conclusion—which is that America had better have a sufficient Navy of her own. With all my heart, let her!

But for the British Navy—the head and front of our offending!

Why is it big? I may deal summarily with this question, for probably not even my opponent in this little discussion would question our right to have a sizeable fleet. It has to be big because (1) The United Kingdom consists of islands, and a fleet is the obvious first line of defence for islands. (2) We depend for subsistence on imported food, and, if our sea-roads were blocked, we should starve. (3) We are, as it were, a world-wide Venice; the King's imperial highways are on the water; if the seas are barred to us, we are split into isolated fragments, unable to work together or act together, to trade with one another, to succour one another, to exist as an organised or effective whole. The sea is the very blood in the arteries and veins of the Empire. Stoppage there spells death. I do not believe that the writer in the *Washington Post* would dispute these statements or quarrel (save, perhaps, on the literary score) with these metaphors. I am thoroughly certain that the Germans would heartily endorse every one of them.

"Yes," the *Washington Post* may say, "but it's one thing to be big, and quite another to be so very big, and to be growing so very quickly." The objection is on a line with what the Dormouse felt about Alice—It's one thing to grow, quite another to grow at such a ridiculous pace, complained the Dormouse. Well, whose fault is that? To whom must our critic address his remonstrance?

Why is the British Navy so very big, and why has it been growing? Simply because we have thought it vitally necessary for our safety, not to increase our superiority, but to maintain our relative superiority against the persistent and implacable challenge of the increased naval armaments of Germany. I call the challenge implacable for the plain reason that we have again and again tried to placate it and to turn it aside, but never with success. We have offered to slacken our rate of building, if Germany would slacken hers; we have offered to take a "naval holiday" if only Germany would take one too. These facts are public property; they stand on record. Nobody could attempt to deny them. The *Washington Post* must be well aware of them. With what face then does it say: "Thus Great Britain moves forward to her goal—the absolute mastery of the sea"? With what plausibility can it speak of Great Britain's "attempt to dominate all nations by securing mastery of the seas"?

For if these offers to Germany—unhappily fruitless and abortive—prove anything, they prove that it was Germany only whom we feared, Germany only against whom we felt compelled to build ships, Germany only whom we conceived to be a menace to us. They prove that Great Britain had no designs against and no apprehensions of any other Power. They negative the idea that she was harbouring any ambitions after an "overlordship" of the sea, in contempt of the rights and interests of

America or of any other nation. If that had been our game, we should have said to Germany: "You do as you please; we're going on building." But it was not Great Britain who said that. It was Germany. Had we been hankering after overlordship, we might well have used the German threat as an excuse for building more and more ships, looking to use them against others than Germany later on. We could have made quite a plausible case there. But we did no such thing. Again and again we offered to stop, if only Germany would leave us the necessary security, the necessary protection for what was our own.

And if we had harboured any such wild ambition, should we have waited and watched while the German Navy grew? It would have been easy to destroy it in its beginnings. We made no attempt to do that. All we said to Germany was—to put it in a line—"Because you could destroy us on land, we must keep ourselves safe against you at sea." And Germany's reply was: "Well, do it, if you can"—which was straight, but not conciliatory. They do not talk quite like that now. They complain of the size of the British fleet; they themselves have caused it. They invite neutrals to take alarm at it. Neutrals would do well to remember that there is another fleet, if not so big, yet big enough for many purposes, if ours were smashed. Nor need my readers be reminded that the German for "overlordship" is not far to seek.

There is nothing like war for making peoples see themselves as others see them. I hope that we, as well as our enemies, will be amenable to this wholesome discipline: we can learn from it, no doubt. All the same, this charge of militarism—whether by sea or land—falls rather surprisingly on our ears. For years we have been listening to reproaches exactly on the opposite score—not only from our "Jingoes," but from men whose words and achievements carried weight; and our present enemies have been loud in declaring that there was no military spirit left among the greedy shopkeepers. But now we are told that "there is no distinction to be made between German militarism and British militarism"!

What are we to say to this charge? Simply that it is based on a confusion of thought, and rendered plausible by an ambiguity in the use of the word "militarism." Military establishments —national forces whether on land or on sea—are one thing. Militarism is quite another. The Germans themselves have told us what they mean by militarism—a nation that is an army and an army that is a nation. That is their understanding of the word; that is the ideal; they glory in it, and in all that it implies—the supremacy of the "War-Lord," the blessings of war, the gospel of conquest, and so on. But what sane man can impute notions like these and an ideal like this to the peoples which compose the British Empire and shape its national life and policy? The writer in the *Washington Post* has fallen into an error which vitiates his whole argument. He does not, or will not, see that militarism is, first of all and above all, a spirit —a national temper, finding its expression in a corresponding national polity and organisation; finding expression, too, by the

mouths of militant philosophers, and in the proclamations of a Monarch whose proudest title is the Lord of War. Do these things reflect the spirit and temper of the free democracies of Great Britain, Canada, Australia? Listen to the writer once more: —

"If Great Britain should emerge triumphant over Germany, and should attempt to assert an overlordship of the seas in contempt of American interests and American rights, this nation would go to war with her again."

On the hypothesis as he states it—and happily even he states it as no more than an hypothesis—there is only one possible comment—Quite right too! But because America would go to war in such a case, are we to call her—does the *Washington Post* call her—militaristic? Because of this are we to say that there is no distinction between German militarism and American militarism? It is precisely because Germany, with her Ally, did—actually, there is no hypothesis here—try to assert an "overlordship" of Europe—and of more than Europe—in contempt of the interests and rights of free peoples, that the British Empire is at war to-day. The paramount object of our armaments—such as they have been, and whether on land or sea—has been, and still is, to prevent any single nation establishing or exercising such an overlordship or hegemony among the nations—for in such a position we have always seen not only the greatest peril to our own security, but the end of freedom for the world. Such is the task in which our arms are now engaged. It is one in which, as it seems to us, we may more reasonably expect from Americans sympathy than suspicion, and in view of which we may more reasonably ask to be commended for what we are doing than to be threatened on the score of what, up to now, we have neither done, nor attempted, nor even been in a position to do.

There is no need to tell us that America will and can, if need be, defend her rights and interests. We are quite aware of the fact; and to tell a man what he knows quite well, and what you know quite well that he knows quite well, is not only, as a rule, superfluous, but may in certain cases be—to say the least of it—somewhat ungracious. Therefore these articles on which I have been commenting seem to us—and will seem, I believe, to many Americans—to be (still saying the least of it) somewhat ungracious. A more serious matter is that they propagate an entirely false and misleading conception of the temper in which the British peoples are fighting this war, and of the aims which inspire their efforts—a conception which, if it spread, would seriously prejudice the good work for the world in which, so soon as circumstances permit, the United States and the British Empire may hope to join hands, even as they are now joining hands in the succour of Belgium. It is doing no good service to either people to undermine the confidence which exists between them to-day, and which has weathered the storms of a hundred years.

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